

Analysis of the 35th Division's Application of Operational Art During World War I

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

Analysis of the 35th Division's Application of Operational Art During World War I, by MAJ Cameron C. Lenahan, US Army, 42 pages.

How did Army National Guard Divisions apply the elements of operational art during World War I? The 35th Division served as a part of the AEF during World War I. The majority of academic research focused on the history of the 35th Division's difficulties during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive due to disorganization, poor artillery support and a bias against the National Guard. This study focuses on how the division's application of the elements of operational art influenced the division's ability to conduct successful operations.

The Meuse-Argonne Offensive is an example of the application of operational art by Army National Guard Divisions. The operations required the 35th Division to apply operational art. The division's application of operational art exhibits the linkage between the elements of end state and conditions, decisive points, tempo, phasing and transitions, culmination, and operational reach.

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Acronyms

AEF	American Expeditionary Force
ADP	Army Doctrine Publication
ADRP	Army Doctrine Reference Publication
JP	Joint Publication
WWI	World War One

Illustrations

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Introduction

The employment of the Army National Guard as an operational force is essential to the Army Total Force Policy. The National Guard's history provides valuable context to United States Army practitioners required to employ the Army National Guard as part of the Total Force. Specifically, the history of National Guard Divisions employed in World War I provides practitioners with examples of the application of operational art. World War I presented the need for forces far beyond those available in the regular army at that time. The War Department met the requirement through the expansion of the Regular Army, establishment of the National Army, and the expansion, federalization, and mobilization of the National Guard. The National Guard 35th Division, made up of soldiers from Kansas and Missouri, served as a part of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) during World War I. The operations conducted by the 35th Division provide an opportunity to study the division's application of the elements of operational art. The division's operations in the Meuse Argonne are a specific example of operational art practiced by an Army National Guard Division. The division's proper employment of elements of operational art led to early success in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, but after the division's initial success, its failure to properly employ those same elements led to its demise and relief from combat. The 35th Division's employment of operational art during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive exhibits the linkage between the elements of end state and conditions, decisive points, tempo, phasing and transitions, culmination, and operational reach.

Literature Review

The body of literature regarding the National Guard as a part of the American Expeditionary Force is quite extensive, but literature concerning the operational employment of National Guard Divisions is quite limited. The Army War College, Army Headquarters, American Battle Monuments Commission, Congress, National Guard veterans of the War, and

Army Command and Staff Officer Course students all found adequate information, within the voluminous records, to provide unique and effective analysis of National Guard Divisions during the World War. Five separate literature groups provide analysis: army assessments, army history, personal reflection, unit histories, and scholarly review. The group of army assessments looked specifically at how National Guard divisions organized, mobilized, trained, fought, and demobilized, and provided relevant lessons from those assessments to the rest of the force. The army history group organized the official WWI army records of National Guard divisions for further research and analysis. The personal reflection group presented detailed first-person analysis and critique of the actions of the 35th Division during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. The unit history group identified an official or default unit historian that presented the unit's history from the perspective of the organization. The scholarly review group conducted multi-layered analysis of the data provided by the other groups to provide highly synthesized historical analyses. These works serve as valuable resources for further analysis of the 35th Division and its application of operational art during World War I.

Immediately following the war, the military assembled primary sources for its use in development of improved methods of instruction, and as historical records. The decade following the war saw the most analysis of the 35th Division's actions in World War I. In addition to the official assessments and historical records, many students at the Advanced Officer Course at Fort Benning, which were veterans of the war and served in the 35th Division, chose to provide personal reflection and critique of the division in their monograph requirement. As the inter-war period ended, the research community compiled fewer studies concerning the actions of the 35th Division. Upon entering World War II and its aftermath, analysis shifted to the events of that time. After the Korean War, scholarly historical analysis of the 35th Division during World War I saw an increase. To fully understand the analysis of the 35th Division that occurred over the last century requires a broad look at the literature available.

An example of an army assessment is Oliver L. Spaulding, Jr.'s *The Thirty Fifth Division 1917-1918: An Analytical Study*, which provides an in-depth assessment of the 35th Division.¹ Spaulding's study of the 35th Division is one of many prepared in the immediate period after the war by the Historical Section of the Army War College. These analytical studies of several AEF divisions examined each division's organization, training, and operations in its first major engagement during WWI. Spaulding's study provides a detailed analysis of the 35th Division's preparation for and actions in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive.

An example of army history is the American Battle Monuments Commission's *35th Division, Summary of Operations in the World War*, which provides succinct details of the division's movements, formations, locations, and actions.² This information comes from original field orders, messages and operations reports, compiled from the time of the division's organization until the last divisional element arrived back in the United States in April of 1919. This publication provides excellent reproductions of primary sources for further research and analysis. Another example is the United States Army Center of Military History's publication, *Order of Battle of the United States Land Forces in the World War, American Expeditionary Forces: Divisions, Volume 2*.³ This publication provides an abbreviated but detailed account of the division's organization, strength, disposition, formations, and actions during specific periods of the division's participation in WWI. It covers the division's constitution through its demobilization in May of 1919, providing one of the best sources to determine the division's movement, location, and actions at specific points in time.

¹ Oliver L. Spaulding, *The Thirty Fifth Division 1917-1918: An Analytical Study* (Washington, DC: Army War College, 1922).

² American Battle Monuments Commission, *35th Division, Summary of Operations in the World War* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1944).

³ Center of Military History, *Order of Battle of the United States Land Forces in the World War: American Expeditionary Forces: Divisions* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1988).

An example of personal reflection and analysis of the 35th Division's actions, specifically during the first phase of the Meuse-Argonne offensive, is Frank E. Bonney's monograph, *Operations of the 35th Division in the First Phase of the Meuse Argonne*.⁴ Bonney served in the 35th Division during WWI and provides a personal account, supported by published and primary sources, that effectively describes the actions during the first phase of the Meuse-Argonne offensive. Bonney further provides analysis and criticism of the division's leadership, resourcing, maneuver, and overall operations. This critique closely resembles an analysis of the division's application of operational art.

Examples of unit histories fall into two sub-groups: Official or unofficial, but those classifications fail to describe what occurred after the war. Many organizations designated historians to produce their official unit histories; but some failed to do so. In those cases where the organization failed to designate an official historian, individuals took it upon themselves to produce such works. Individuals that produced these works were often members of the organization and became the de facto unit historian. Another group are professional historians that produced the unit's history, which by default became the official history of the organization. The division history, Clair Kenamore's *From Vauquois Hiss to Exermont, A History of the 35th Division of the United States Army* provides a broad perspective and includes reproductions of many official messages and reports.⁵ This group of unit histories, written from diverse perspectives, provides significant information for detailed research and analysis.

⁴ Frank E. Bonney, "Operations of the 35th Division in the First Phase of the Meuse Argonne." (Monograph, Advanced Officers Course, The Infantry School, 1923).

⁵ Clair Kenamore, *From Vauquois Hill to Exermont: A History of the Thirty-Fifth Division* (St. Louis, MO: Guard Publishing, 1919).

The final group is the scholarly review group which includes Robert H. Ferrell's *Collapse at Meuse-Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division*.⁶ Ferrell is an American historian known for his books on President Harry S. Truman and the AEF in WWI. His book, *Collapse at Meuse-Argonne*, is a modern and succinct professional analysis of the Thirty-Fifth Division's actions in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. His analysis of past works and primary sources provides an authoritative perspective of the 35th Division in WWI, specifically during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive.

A gap exists in the current research on the 35th Division during World War I. The existing body of research fails to examine the division's application of operational art during World War I. Thorough review of works from the five literature groups mentioned above provide an opportunity for analysis of the division's actions during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, while retroactively applying operational art.

Methodology

The methodology will be a historical case study of the 35th Division during World War I. This paper specifically examines the 35th Division's operations during the five days the division participated in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive from September 26 to October 1, 1918. This analysis contains four major sections: the Context of World War I, the Strategic Role of National Guard Divisions in World War I, the 35th Division in World War I, and Conclusion and Lessons on the Application of Operational Art. These four sections provide context and details of how the 35th Division became a part of, and performed as, a front-line division of the AEF during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. The section describing the 35th Division in World War I contains a

⁶ Robert H. Ferrell, *Collapse at Meuse-Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2004).

subsection focused on the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, further divided into six subsections detailing each day of the division's participation in the offensive. These six subsections attempt to show how the 35th Division applied operational art during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive and identify the linkage between the elements of operational art applied by the division.

Definitions and Terms

Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations*, defines operational art as “the cognitive approach by commanders and staffs – supported by their skill, knowledge, experience, creativity, and judgment – to develop strategies, campaigns, and operations to organize and employ military forces by integrating ends, ways, and means.”⁷ The Army refined the definition of operational art with focus on arranging tactical actions. Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*, defines operational art as “the pursuit of strategic objectives, in whole or in part, through the arrangement of tactical actions in time, space, and purpose.”⁸

Elements of operational art

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• End state and conditions• Center of gravity• Decisive points• Lines of operations and lines of effort• Basing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tempo• Phasing and transitions• Culmination• Operational reach• Risk
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Figure 1. Elements of Operational Art. Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, November 11, 2016), 2-4.

⁷ Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2011), GL-14.

⁸ Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2016), 2-1.

Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*, identifies the elements of operational art as intellectual tools which aid in the application of operational art.⁹ The ten elements of operational art are: end state and conditions, centers of gravity, decisive points, lines of operations and lines of effort, operational reach, basing, tempo, phasing and transitions, culmination, and risk.¹⁰ This analysis explores the use of the elements by the 35th Division in its application of operational art during WWI.

JP 3-0 defines end state as “the set of required conditions that defines achievement of the commander's objectives.”¹¹ ADRP 3-0 further expands the concept of the end state with focus on the commander's role in specifying the desired end state and conditions as the set of desired future conditions the commander wants to exist when an operation ends. The reason for identifying the commander's role is that a clearly defined end state promotes unity of effort, facilitates integration, synchronization, and disciplined initiative, and helps mitigate risk. Commanders must explicitly describe the end state and its conditions for every operation to avoid missions becoming vague and operations losing focus. ADRP 3-0 identifies that successful commanders direct every operation toward a clearly defined, conclusive, and attainable end state (goal). Because the end state may evolve as an operation transpires, commanders must continuously monitor operations, assess whether their progress will lead to achieving their desired end state, and determine if they need to reframe.¹²

A decisive point is a geographic place, specific key event, critical factor, or function that, when acted upon, allows commanders to gain a marked advantage over an adversary or contribute

⁹ Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2016).

¹⁰ Ibid., 2–3.

¹¹ JP 3-0, GL-9.

¹² ADRP 3-0, 2–3.

materially to achieving success.¹³ They help commanders select clear, conclusive, attainable objectives that directly contribute to achieving the end state. Geographic decisive points can include port facilities, distribution networks and nodes, and bases of operation. A decisive point's importance requires the enemy to commit significant resources to defend it. Decisive points enable commanders to seize, retain, or exploit the initiative. Controlling them is essential to mission accomplishment. Enemy control of a decisive point may exhaust friendly momentum, force early culmination, or allow an enemy counterattack.¹⁴

Tempo is the relative speed and rhythm of military operations over time with respect to the enemy. Commanders must control the tempo of an operation to maintain the force's operational reach. Commanders must maintain a tempo appropriate to retaining and exploiting the initiative and achieving the end state. There is more to tempo than speed. While speed can be important, commanders mitigate speed to achieve endurance and optimize operational reach.¹⁵

A phase is a planning and execution tool used to split an operation in time or action. Time, distance, terrain, or an event may lead planners to consider using phases in planning and controlling an operation. A specific set of conditions marks the end of a phase. Phasing can extend operational reach. Transitions mark a change of focus between phases or the execution of a branch or sequel. Shifting between the offense and defense requires a transition. Transitions require planning to maintain operational momentum and tempo.¹⁶

Culmination represents a crucial shift in relative combat power at the culminating point, defined by ADRP 3-0 as the point in time and space at which a force no longer possesses the capability to continue its current form of operations. ADRP 3-0 goes further to explain that while

¹³ Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2011), GL-8.

¹⁴ ADRP 3-0, 2-4.

¹⁵ Ibid., 2-7.

¹⁶ Ibid., 2-9.

conducting offensive tasks, the culminating point occurs when the force cannot continue the attack and must assume a defensive posture or execute an operational pause. Culmination occurs when units are too dispersed and when they lack the required resources to achieve the end state. Direct combat actions typically cause culmination, which can occur in all types of military operations.¹⁷

Operational Reach is the distance and duration across which a joint force can successfully employ military capabilities.¹⁸ Operational reach is a function of intelligence, protection, sustainment, endurance, and relative combat power. The limit of a unit's operational reach is its culminating point. Endurance, momentum, and protection dictate a force's operational reach. Endurance of a force considers its ability to conduct operations over a specified area and time. Momentum is the force's ability to continue to exploit the initiative. Protection allows the force to maintain its endurance and momentum.¹⁹

The provided definitions and terms aid in the analysis of the 35th Division's application of operational art during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive.

Context of World War I

On February 28, 1915, a German cruiser sank the American merchant ship *William P. Frey*. The German torpedoing and sinking of British passenger ship *Falaba* on March 28, 1915 followed, which resulted in the loss of one American life. The German aggression continued with the limited aerial bombing of the American tanker *Cushing* on April 28, 1915. Three days later, on May 1, 1915, a German submarine torpedoed the American tanker *Gulflight*. On May 7, 1915, the infamous sinking of the British ocean liner *Lusitania* occurred, which took 114 American

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ JP 3-0, GL-15.

¹⁹ ADRP 3-0, 2-9.

lives. On May 10, 1915, the US State Department delivered a message from President Wilson to Germany condemning the attacks. The message received little response from Germany. The Germans continued their attacks on shipping, sinking the American steamship *Leelenaw* on July 25, 1915; after seizing the cargo and letting the crew escape. The German torpedo sinking of the British ocean liner *Arabic*, on August 19, 1915, took two more American lives, resulting in diplomatic action between the United States and Germany. The Germans pledged to no longer attack civilian ships without first giving warning and allowing all onboard to escape. Germany lessened its attacks for eight months until, on March 24, 1916, it torpedoed the French passenger ferry *Sussex*, killing at least fifty. This attack prompted President Wilson to call a Joint session of the United States Congress on April 19, 1916, where he condemned Germany's submarine warfare against civilian shipping and threatened to cut diplomatic relations. Again, Germany agreed to halt its attacks on civilian shipping and used the year long pause to replenish its submarine fleet. On February 1, 1917, Germany announced that it would return to unlimited submarine warfare, compelling the United States to cut diplomatic relations on February 3, 1917.²⁰

While Germany was conducting attacks at sea, it was also conducting actions against infrastructure within the United States. Germany, through covert actors, damaged and interrupted the operations of vital US communications, ammunition supply, and inter-state shipping. Germany also took diplomatic action in the form of the notorious Zimmermann Telegram. On January 19, 1917, German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmerman sent a telegram to Mexico requesting an alliance. The alliance was to include Japan, Germany, and Mexico. Germany proposed that if the alliance went to war with the United States, Mexico would stand to regain its

²⁰ Justus D. Doenecke, *Nothing Less Than War: A New History of America's Entry into World War I* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 58–92, 249–77; George W. Browne and Rosecrans W. Pillsbury, *The American Army in the World War; A Divisional Record of the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe* (Manchester, NH: Overseas Book, 1921), 18–20.

lost territories of New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona. British intelligence intercepted and decoded the secret telegram and revealed its contents to the United States. Minister Zimmerman confirmed the authenticity of the contents of the telegram on March 3, 1917. The renewed unlimited submarine warfare, covert destruction within the United States, and the Zimmerman Telegram enraged the American population and forced President Wilson to act. On April 2, 1917, President Wilson requested what he termed an extraordinary session of the US Congress, where he identified Germany's transgressions and called upon Congress to grant him the authority to put the many resources of the United States against Germany. The United States declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917.²¹

On May 10, 1917, President Wilson selected Major General John J. Pershing to serve as the Commander in Chief of the American Expeditionary Force. On May 19, 1917, President Wilson instructed Major General Pershing "to proceed to France at as early a date as practicable."²² Pershing and a staff of fifty-three officers and 146 men boarded the White Star liner *Baltic* on May 28, 1917 and arrived in Liverpool, England on June 8, 1917.²³ Pershing spent four days in England, where he met with the King and other leaders, before taking a boat to France on June 13, 1917. French government and military leaders greeted Pershing as he landed in the French port city of Boulogne. He then proceeded onto Paris where he received a hero's welcome. Pershing spent the first few days in Paris attending to ceremonial duties, but soon after got to work preparing for war. At the time the United States entered the war, the total strength of the army was around 200,000. Pershing and his staff estimated that by June of 1918 the United States would need at least twenty-four divisions on the front lines, which alone would be 700,000

²¹ Doenecke, *Nothing Less Than War: A New History of America's Entry into World War I*, 58–92, 249–77; Browne and Pillsbury, *The American Army in the World War: A Divisional Record of the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe*, 18–20.

²² Army Times Editors, *The Yanks Are Coming: The Story of General John J. Pershing* (New York: Putnam, 1960), 57.

²³ Shipley Thomas, *The History of the A.E.F.* (New York: George H. Doran, 1920), 27.

soldiers. That number did not include the support forces, which were nearly as many as the fighting units. Over one million AEF soldiers were in France by July of 1918. In that same month, Pershing requested sixty-six divisions, or about three million soldiers, in France by May of 1919. At the time of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, the AEF had nearly 1.4 million men in France. Twenty-two divisions participated in the Meuse-Argonne from September 26 to November 11, 1918. To produce the number of soldiers required for the war, the United States relied on the selective service draft to fill the ranks of the Regular, National Guard, and National Army. The Regular Army divisions numbered from one to twenty-five, the National Guard divisions from twenty-six to forty-nine, and the National Army from fifty to one-hundred.²⁴ The War Department authorized the National Guard war time strength of four-hundred and fifty thousand and federalized its divisions for organization, training, and service in war.²⁵

Strategic Role of National Guard Divisions in World War I

The National Guard has a long history of serving the nation, starting with the formation of the first militia on December 13, 1636. Citizen soldiers, regular members of the citizenry with civilian professions as their primary occupation, that are not part of the active military, make up the National Guard. Since the formation of the first militia during colonial times, militias and national guards of the states provided military force structure to every conflict.

The Militia Acts of 1903 and 1908, and the subsequent National Defense Act of 1916, formalized the National Guard at the Federal Level. The Militia Act of 1903, known as the Dick Act, replaced the Militia Act of 1792 and converted the militia into the National Guard. The act increased the funding and equipment for the Guard units and established training and

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

performance standards.²⁶ The Act required the National Guard to conduct maneuvers with the Army and authorized Guardsmen to serve for up to nine months of service, but only within the borders of the United States. The Militia Act of 1908 removed the nine-month limit, allowed guardsmen to serve outside of the United States, and established the Division of Militia Affairs.²⁷ To address the many issues plaguing the security of the nation at that time, Congress passed the National Defense Act of 1916. It called for significant changes to the National Guard. At the time, the United States was facing issues with Mexico and the impending need to address Germany's unrestricted submarine warfare. The 1916 act required members of the National Guard to have separate formal oaths to their state and the United States. It increased the amount of drill periods per year from twenty-four to forty-eight, as well as requiring annual training to increase from five days to fifteen. The Division of Militia Affairs became the Militia Bureau and was responsible for managing the newly allotted annual budget. The act authorized the National Guard strength increased to four-hundred and fifty thousand soldiers.²⁸

The militias we now call the National Guard participated in all the nation's major conflicts. The colonies established their own local militias to protect the citizens and resources. After the Civil War, there was an effort to formalize and standardize the nation's militias. The standing army authorized by Congress after the Civil War failed to provide the required manpower for the conflicts of the late 1800s. During the Spanish-American War, most of the force came from militias, with entire regiments joining the war effort. The Army used the militias that volunteered for the Spanish-American War as forces in the Philippine Insurrection. These militias provided most of the forces employed in the Philippines and twenty militia members

²⁶ Michael D. Doubler, *Civilian in Peace, Soldier in War: The Army National Guard, 1636 - 2000* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 128.

²⁷ Ibid., 134.

²⁸ Edward B. Lee, *Politics of Our Military National Defense* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1940), 30.

received the Medal of Honor for their actions there.²⁹ The National Guard provided most of the forces used for the Border Wars and the Punitive Expedition, with National Guard units utilizing the nation's established rail road network to quickly and effectively deliver units from as far as Connecticut to the Mexican border.³⁰ The Spanish-American War, Philippine Insurrection, Border War, and Punitive Expedition provided valuable combat experience which the National Guard soldiers used during their employment in World War I. Specifically, the mobilization, management and maneuver of large units in conflicts prior to World War I provided National Guard Divisions experience and practice in the execution of operational art.

The National Guard played a strategic role in the success of the AEF during WWI. In May 1917, the total strength of the Army including National Guard was 200,000 soldiers. Pershing and his staff estimated the AEF would require over a million soldiers in France within the coming year. The President and Congress were working to provide Pershing with the resources he needed to successfully execute the war. Not only did the AEF need soldiers, it needed them quickly. The fastest way to generate trained forces was to mobilize the National Guard. Trained and qualified National Guardsmen required less time to bring to the level required to deploy to France. Seventeen National Guard divisions, along with their supporting units participated in World War I. Without the National Guard, the AEF would not have been able to provide enough soldiers to defeat the German Army.³¹

²⁹ Doubler, *Civilian in Peace, Soldier in War: The Army National Guard, 1636 - 2000*, 121.

³⁰ Ibid., 68.

³¹ Ibid.

35th DIVISION (NG)

COMPOSITION

69th Infantry Brigade	70th Infantry Brigade	60th Field Artillery Brigade
187th Infantry 138th Infantry 129th Machine Gun Battalion	139th Infantry 140th Infantry 130th Machine Gun Battalion	128th Field Artillery (75) 129th Field Artillery (75) 130th Field Artillery (155) 110th Trench Mortar Battery
Divisional Troops		Trains
128th Machine Gun Battalion 110th Engineers 110th Field Signal Battalion Headquarters Troop		110th Train Headquarters and Military Police 110th Ammunition Train 110th Supply Train 110th Engineer Train 110th Sanitary Train (Ambulance Companies and Field Hospitals 137-140)

Figure 2. Thirty-Fifth Division (NG) Composition. Center of Military History, *Order of Battle of the United States Land Forces in the World War, Vol. 2, American Expeditionary Forces: Divisions* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, US Army, 1988), 211.

The 35th Division in World War I

On July 18, 1917, the United States established the 35th Division and designated members of the Kansas and Missouri National Guards to fill its ranks. On August 3, 1917, the Department of War instructed the 35th Division to organize at Camp Doniphan, Fort Sill, Oklahoma for training. The War Department drafted the Kansas and Missouri National Guards into federal service on August 5, 1917 to serve as part of the American Expeditionary Force. On August 23, 1917, the 35th Division began to assemble at Camp Doniphan. Major General William M. Wright, a veteran of the Spanish-American War, Philippine Incursion, Veracruz Occupation, and Pancho Villa Expedition, assumed command of the division on August 25, 1917. The division commenced training on September 9, 1918, and continued to organize and prepare for war. On October 22, 1917, the division received three-thousand Kansas and Missouri draftees. In late February and early March of 1918, additional selective service soldiers arrived from Camp

Funston and Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, as well as from Camp Travis, Texas. These additional soldiers nearly filled the division to its authorized strength of twenty-six thousand.³²

The division completed its training at Camp Doniphan and began to entrain for ports of embarkation on April 3, 1918. The division encamped at Camp Merritt, New Jersey and Camp Mills, New York while on the way to the east coast embarkation ports of Brooklyn, Hoboken, New York City, and Philadelphia. While at Camp Merritt and Camp Mills, the division continued to train and received two-thousand additional soldiers, bringing the division to full strength. Between April 16 and May 27, 1918, the division boarded transport ships for the two-week voyage to Europe, and arrived between April 28 and June 8, 1918. Once in England, the division enjoyed a brief time at rest camps, then proceeded across the English Channel to the port city of Le Havre, France.³³

After arriving in France, the division trained with the British near Eu from May 12 to June 8, 1918. The division then moved to the Alsace region and trained with the French from June 9 to September 2, 1918. On June 16, 1918, Brigadier General Nathaniel F. McClure took command of the division. While in the Alsace region, elements of the division, along with the French Twenty-Second Division, occupied the Wesserling sector from June 20 to July 26, 1918. On July 16, 1918, Major General Peter E. Traub, a veteran of conflicts in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, took command of the division.³⁴ The division occupied the northern half of the Wesserling Sector, known as the Fecht Sector from July 27 to August 13, 1918. From August 14 to September 2, 1918, the division occupied the southern part of the Anould Sector, known as the Gerardmer Sector. The field artillery was not with the division from the time it left Camp

³² Center of Military History, *Order of Battle of the United States Land Forces in the World War: American Expeditionary Forces: Divisions*, 213.

³³ Kenamore, *From Vauquois Hill to Exermont: A History of the Thirty-Fifth Division*, 29.

³⁴ Spaulding, *The Thirty Fifth Division 1917-1918: An Analytical Study*, 13.

Doniphan until it rejoined on August 15, 1918. On August 27, 1918, the Sixtieth Field Artillery Brigade assumed control of all artillery in the Gerardmer Sector. From September 2 to September 10, 1918, the division moved from the Gerardmer Sector to the American First Army area in Forêt de Haye. The division remained in Forêt de Haye and served as part of the American First Army's reserve during the St. Mihiel Operation. From September 21 to September 25, 1918 the division occupied the Grange-le-Comte Sector of the Lorraine region, in preparation for the Meuse-Argonne Offensive.³⁵



Figure 3. German Defensive Organization in the Meuse-Argonne Region. American Battle Monuments Commission, *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1938), 170.

³⁵ Center of Military History, *Order of Battle of the United States Land Forces in the World War: American Expeditionary Forces: Divisions*, 215.

From September 26 to October 1, 1918 the division participated in the first phase of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. On September 26, 1918, the division found success and advanced to its objective, the Cote 218 – Hill 102 line, with little resistance. The following day, September 27, 1918, while facing fierce resistance and flanking fire, the division renewed the attack, with leading elements reaching the ridge north east of Charpentry. On the third day of the offensive, September 28, 1918, facing overwhelming flanking fire and resistance, the disorganized and depleted division advanced to the Montrebeau Wood. The last day of the division's advance, September 29, 1918, the weakened lead elements, twice, attacked through Exermont, which they failed to hold. The forward elements of the division withdrew south to the defensive line established by the engineers along the ridge north of Baulny. At 11:00 a.m. that same day, Major General Traub requested withdrawal of the division from the line for reorganization and replacement. On September 30, 1918, the division reinforced its defensive line and repulsed multiple German attacks. On the night of September 30 – October 1, 1918, the 1st Division replaced the 35th Division in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive.³⁶

During the five days of combat the 35th Division experienced in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, the division applied operational art. Specifically, the division's proper application of the elements of end state and conditions, decisive points, tempo, phasing and transitions, culmination, and operational reach resulted in success during the first day. After the first day, the division's poor application of the same elements of operational art led to the division's premature culmination, limiting of its operational reach, and removal from combat.

³⁶ Ibid., 219.

Meuse-Argonne Offensive

The 35th Division occupied Forêt de Hay as part of the First Army Reserve during the St. Mihiel Offensive until September 15, 1918. The division moved to the Meuse-Argonne area, where it became part of First Corps, First Army in preparation for the offensive. The division relieved the French 73rd Division and took command of the Grange-le-Comte Sector during the night of September 20, 1918, with members of the French 73rd Division remaining in the outpost positions until the night of September 25, 1918 to conceal the upcoming offensive from the enemy.³⁷

The American Army, with the First, Fifth and Third Corps, from left to right, occupied the line from the western edge of the Argonne Forest to the Meuse River on the East. On the left, the 77th, 28th, and 35th Divisions, from left to right, made up the First Corps. In the middle, the 91st, 37th, and 79th Divisions, from left to right, made up the Fifth Corps. On the right, the 4th, 80th, and 33rd Divisions, from left to right made up the Third Corps.³⁸

The French Fourth Army, on the left of the American Army, was to support the attack by reducing the Argonne Forest from the west. The French Seventeenth Corps, French Second Colonial Corps, and Fourth Corps, from left to right, served as a part of the Combined First Army east of the Meuse River. The French Seventeenth Corps, on the right of the American Army, was to support the attack by neutralizing enemy fire and observation from the heights east of the Meuse.³⁹

³⁷ American Battle Monuments Commission, *35th Division, Summary of Operations in the World War*, 7.

³⁸ Center of Military History, *Order of Battle of the United States Land Forces in the World War: American Expeditionary Forces: Divisions*, 217–19.

³⁹ H.A. Drum, “Field Order No. 30,” in *United States Army in the World War 1917-1919, Military Operations of the American Expeditionary Forces: St. Mihiel* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1948), 82–86.

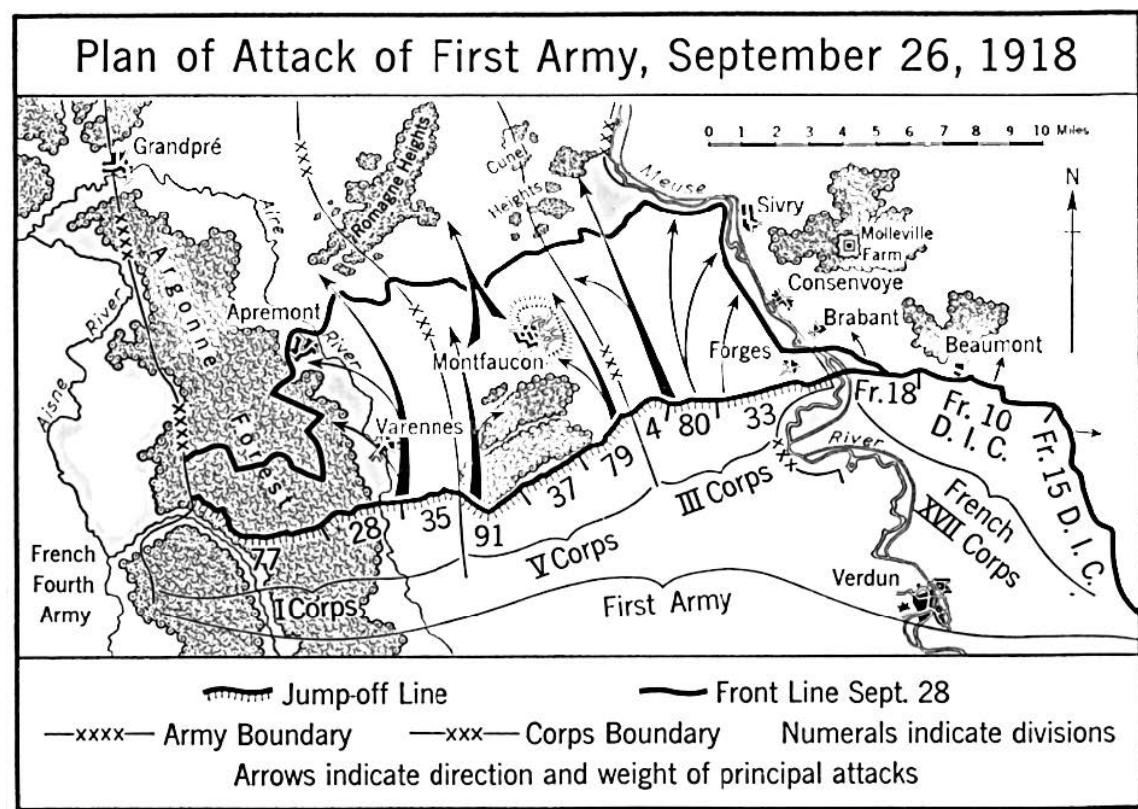


Figure 4. Plan of Attack of First Army, September 26, 1918. American Battle Monuments Commission, *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1938), 172.

First Army issued the field order for the Meuse-Argonne Offensive on September 20, 1918. The order directed First Corps to reduce the Argonne Forest by flanking it from the east. The order identified a line of operation from Vauquois to Exermont for the first day of the operation, with the corps advancing in phases to decisive points identified as objectives. The order directed First Corps to advance without consideration for units to its flanks during the first phase, to the initial corps' objective at Montblainville. The second phase required the First and Third Corps commanders to regulate their advance to the American Army objective, located along the line of the enemy third position, based on the Fifth Corps' rate of advance. The order directed First Corps to advance, by the afternoon of the first day, to its second phase objective located at Exermont, along the American Army objective. Following attainment of the American

Army objective on the first day, First Corps would then advance to the Combined Army first objective, and successive objectives, regulated by army orders.⁴⁰

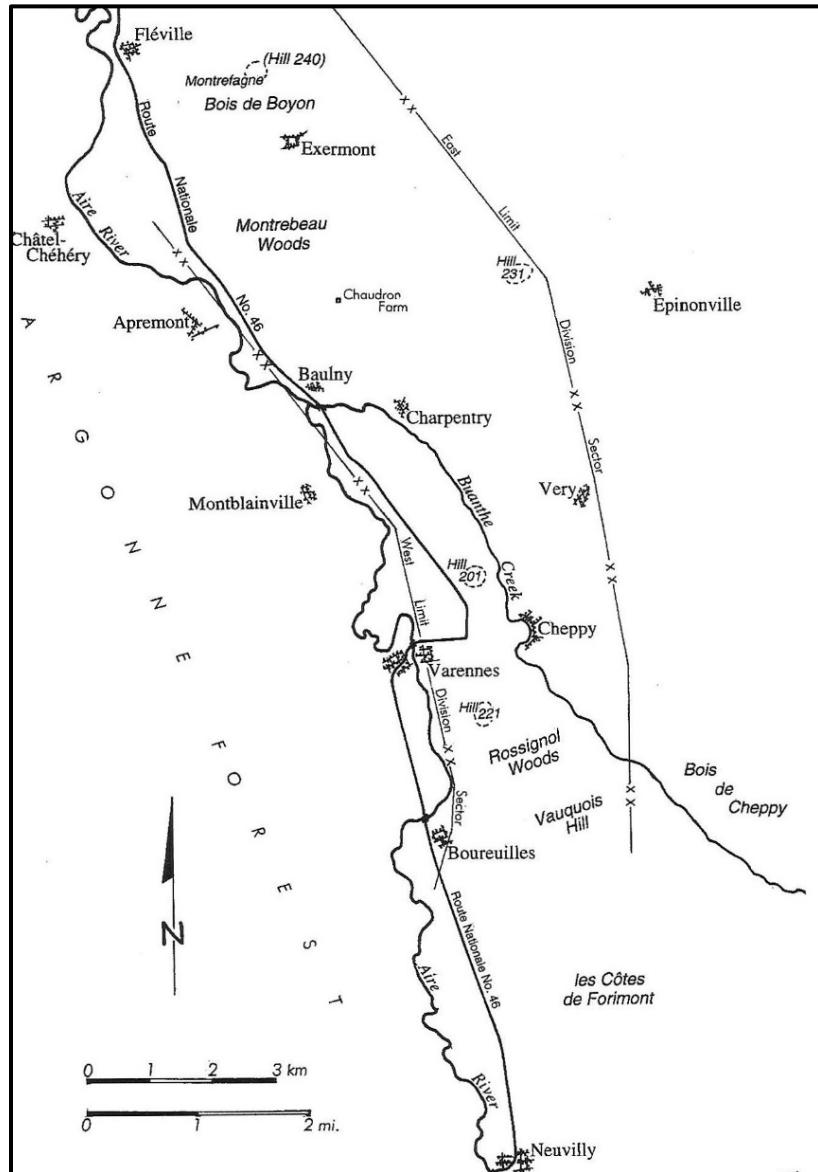


Figure 5. 35th Division Sector. Robert H. Ferrell, *America's Deadliest Battle: Meuse-Argonne, 1918* (Lawrence, KS: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2007), 58.

⁴⁰ John J. Pershing, *Final Report of Gen. John J. Pershing, Commander-in-Chief American Expeditionary Forces* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1920), 43–47.

September 26, 1918

During the first day, the division maintained the tempo required to conduct effective and sustained offensive operations within the time allotted for the initial phases of the offensive. The division's desired end state and conditions at the end of the first day was to have the division at the American Army objective with the division's zone of action secured and the division organized and ready to continue the advance the following day to the Combined Army first objective.⁴¹

The division identified Vauquois Hill, Cheppy, and Very as the decisive points required for the division to meet the desired end state and conditions. These decisive points were clear and attainable objectives the division believed would directly contribute to achieving the end state. The division identified that taking Vauquois Hill would provide a marked advantage and contribute to the division achieving success. The enemy knew it needed to commit significant resources to defend Vauquois Hill and opted to focus its defense on the second and third positions of the defense. The division took Vauquois Hill due to the enemy failing to provide the forces and equipment necessary to retain it. The division's decision for its lead elements to pass by Vauquois Hill on both the left and right, with follow-on forces clearing the remaining enemy forces and taking the decisive point, enabled the division to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative on the first day. Major General Traub described his plan for the attack and actions at Vauquois Hill in his testimony during hearings before the Committee on Rules of the House of Representatives concerning the losses of the 35th Division during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive:

We had Vauquois Hill, which was a very serious proposition. The boche had craters 50 feet deep across the middle ridge. In the rear, they had very strong woods known as the Nightingale Woods. On both flanks, they had extremely strong positions, everything fixed up with wire and man traps and every conceivable sort of defensive device which they had been able to construct for four years. That is the thing we were going to shove

⁴¹ Peter Traub, "Field Order No. 44," September 24, 1918, Records of the American Expeditionary Forces (World War I): Records of the 35th Division, US Army, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

flesh and blood up against to take from those devils along a front, to start with, of over 3 kilometers.

My plan was to attack in column of brigades, each regiment in column of battalions, and to outflank absolutely on both sides this tough proposition of the Vauquois Hill. In order to do that we had to squelch the Vauquois Hill, and squelch the strong defense on both sides in the rear. That was planned for the artillery, and they did it, and they did it wonderfully well.

This was the beginning of the battle. They actually squelched the whole business. We had American manned and French manned tanks. Everything was prepared, everything was arranged, and the signal was given, and then all hell broke loose. Those battalions on both sides advanced in phalanx and it was a marvelous thing. They had orders to absolutely disregard this Vauquois Hill and Nightingale Woods on their right and left, so it became very important to kill off the boche in those two places. So, I formed a mopping up battalion, attached to the three battalions on the left, and as these troops swung forward under the protection of a barrage, two companies of this mopping up battalion, as soon as they got opposite the Vauquois Hill, these troops were sweeping up here, and as soon as they got opposite the two companies, turned down and hooked up there, and they had it out hand to hand with the boche, with the result that in almost every case the boche came out and were taken. Then the next two companies of the mopping up battalion, as soon as they got opposite the Nightingale Woods, swept in, and it was the same hand to hand business.

So, when I came along to renew the attack, which was temporarily stalled, the situation had been solved. We had taken in three hours what the French had been up against for four straight years, that the Boche by every means in their power had tried to render impregnable, and at the end of three hours the whole business was in our hands with very small losses – ridiculously small.⁴²

The division set a tempo on the first day of the attack that was key to its success. The division efficiently pushed its lead elements up past Vauquois Hill, following the artillery barrage. The follow and support units cleared the remaining enemy from Vauquois Hill, allowing the lead elements to make it to the Cote 218 – Hill 202 line north of Very and extend the division's operational reach. The tempo kept the offensive moving in unison with the artillery and

⁴² US Congress, *Losses of Thirty-Fifth Division During the Argonne Battle: Hearings Before the Committee on Rules of the House of Representatives on H. Res 505* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1919), 81–82.

tanks that supported the division on the first day and exploited the initiative. The division was never able to establish and maintain that level of offensive tempo after the first day of fighting.⁴³

The division's use of phasing and transitions enabled its success during the first day of the offensive. The first phase included preparatory artillery fire and a rolling barrage, followed by the infantry attack. The next phase was the follow and support units that mopped up Vauquois Hill and other enemy defensive positions. The next phase was to clear Cheppy and Very. Once the division advanced to the Cote 218 – Hill 202 line, it transitioned to defensive positions for the night in anticipation of the advance the following morning. During the transition to defense for the evening, the division consolidated, reorganized, and fed the soldiers in preparation for the next day's offensive.⁴⁴

The initial division formation for the assault was brigades in column that put the Sixty-Ninth Brigade in the lead and the Seventieth Brigade designated as the division reserve in the rear. For the initial phase of the operation, the Sixty-Ninth Brigade consisted of the 137th and 138th Infantry Regiments, 129th Machine Gun Battalion, and the Second Battalion of the 139th Infantry Regiment from the Seventieth Brigade. The Sixty-Ninth Brigade placed its regiments abreast, with the Third and Second Battalions of the 137th Infantry Regiment on the left, the Third and First Battalions of the 138th Infantry on the right, and placed the Second Battalion of the 139th Infantry Regiment in the center. The Sixty-Ninth Brigade formed the brigade reserve from the Second Battalion of the 138th Infantry Regiment, the First Battalion of the 137th Infantry Regiment, and two companies of the 129th Machine Gun Battalion. The Seventieth Brigade, serving as the division reserve, followed the Sixty-Ninth Brigade in column. The Seventieth Brigade also placed its regiments abreast, with the Third and First Battalions of the

⁴³ Ferrell, *Collapse at Meuse-Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division*, 47.

⁴⁴ Arthur E. Hartzell, *Meuse-Argonne Battle: (Sept. 26-Nov. 11, 1918)* (Chaumont, France: General Headquarters, American Expeditionary Forces, Second Section, General Staff, 1918), 26–30.

139th Infantry Regiment on the left, and the First and Second Battalions of the 140th Infantry Regiment on the right. The Seventieth Brigade formed its brigade reserve from the Third Battalion of the 140th Infantry Regiment, and the 128th and 130th Machine Gun Battalions.⁴⁵

The corps tasked the division with advancing to the corps objective, which was a line from the east edge of the Argonne Forest at Grandpré through Exermont to another point east. The adjacent units were the 28th Division on the left, to the west of the Aire River and the 91st Division of Fifth Corps on the right to the east of Very and Blaunthe Creek. The first day of the offensive, the division moved quickly up the center, by-passing Vauquois Hill fortifications, in part aided by the dense fog. The leading Sixty-Ninth Brigade's 137th Regiment quickly got to Cheppy and cleared the town. The trailing 138th Regiment performed mop up operations of Vauquois Hill and the defensive fortifications. Beyond Cheppy, the 137th Regiment began to face stiff opposition that slowed its advance. The efficient and effective advance of the Division's Regiments accomplished in hours what the French army had been unable to do for four years.⁴⁶

The lead division elements moved at a rate significantly quicker than the 28th on the left and 91st on the right. This caused the division to form a salient that exposed its flanks, most significant being the exposed flank on the left that was observable by the enemy in the Argonne Heights.⁴⁷ The speed of the division also kept it from employing the artillery in a manner to enable success of the infantry advances. The artillery became held up on the severely congested north south routes and could not move, set, and fire quick enough to provide effective fires for the

⁴⁵ American Battle Monuments Commission, *35th Division, Summary of Operations in the World War*, 13.

⁴⁶ US Congress, *Losses of Thirty-Fifth Division During the Argonne Battle: Hearings Before the Committee on Rules of the House of Representatives on H. Res 505*, 82.

⁴⁷ Hunter Liggett, *Commanding an American Army: Recollections of the World War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1925), 83.

infantry elements. The first artillery barrage and final artillery barrage were the only effective uses of the artillery during the division's offensive from September 26 to 30, 1918.⁴⁸

At 2:30 a.m. on September 26, 1918, the division artillery began preparatory fire on the enemy defenses along the division's line of operations. At 5:30 a.m., the division infantry, following behind the rolling the artillery barrage, commenced the attack supported by machine gun fire and tanks. At 8:30 a.m., the lead elements of the 138th Infantry advanced east of Vauquois Hill where they met the enemy main line of resistance at Cheppy.⁴⁹ At 9:30 a.m., the lead elements of the 137th Infantry reached the enemy's main line of resistance between Varennes and Cheppy, then became held up by enemy fire.⁵⁰ At 11:00 a.m., four tank companies from the corps reserve joined the two tanks companies previously attached. At 12:30 p.m., the 138th Infantry took the enemy strongpoint at Cheppy, with the assistance of the tank companies. At 1:00 pm, elements of the 138th Infantry moved ahead east of Cheppy and established liaison with the 91st Division. At 1:30 p.m., the elements of the 138th Infantry in and around Cheppy assembled in the town and reorganized.⁵¹ At 2:45 p.m. the 139th Infantry passed through the 137th Infantry.⁵² At that same time, First Corps sent a message to the division to advance to the division's decisive point at Exermont along the American Army's objective. At 3:30 p.m., the 138th Infantry advanced to Very which it found occupied by elements of the 91st Division. At 4:45 p.m., the 138th Infantry formed a line for the night on the south slope of Cote 218.⁵³ At 6:00

⁴⁸ Jay M. Lee, *The Artilleryman; The Experiences and Impressions of an American Artillery Regiment in the World War. 129th F.A., 1917-1919* (Kansas City, MO: Press of Spencer Printing, 1920), 192.

⁴⁹ Kenamore, *From Vauquois Hill to Exermont: A History of the Thirty-Fifth Division*, 93-97.

⁵⁰ Carl E. Haterius, *Reminiscences of the 137th U.S. Infantry* (Topeka, KS: Crane, 1919), 147.

⁵¹ Kenamore, *From Vauquois Hill to Exermont: A History of the Thirty-Fifth Division*, 117-24.

⁵² Clair Kenamore, *The Story of the 139th Infantry* (St. Louis, MO: Guard Publishing, 1920), 20.

⁵³ Kenamore, *From Vauquois Hill to Exermont: A History of the Thirty-Fifth Division*, 124.

p.m., the 139th Infantry advanced east of Varennes and formed a line for the night on Hill 202 south of Charpentry.⁵⁴ At 6:35 pm, the division ordered the Sixty-Ninth Brigade to attack, but the brigade did not receive the message and failed to attack at that time. At 11:00 p.m., the division sent another field message ordering the Sixty-Ninth Brigade to attack, but the brigade failed to communicate the order to its lead elements and again failed to mount an attack that evening.⁵⁵

September 27, 1918

After the first day, the division was not able to maintain the tempo required to conduct effective and sustained offensive operations within the time allotted for the initial phases of the offensive. During the second day of the offensive, the disorganized division facing intense enemy fire, inefficiently moved forward along its designated line of operations toward its prescribed objective.⁵⁶

Although the division mistakenly issued two sets of field orders with conflicting times of 5:30 a.m. and 8:45 a.m., both sets of orders specified the same end state and conditions.⁵⁷ The second day's desired end state was like that of the previous day, with the difference being the location of the objective at Exermont. Like the first day, the desired conditions at the end of the second day required the division's zone of action secured and the division organized and ready to continue the advance the following day to the Combined Army first objective.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Kenamore, *The Story of the 139th Infantry*, 25.

⁵⁵ American Battle Monuments Commission, *35th Division, Summary of Operations in the World War*, 14–15.

⁵⁶ Spaulding, *The Thirty Fifth Division 1917-1918: An Analytical Study*, 33–37.

⁵⁷ Charles B. Hoyt, *Heroes of the Argonne: An Authentic History of the Thirty-Fifth Division* (Kansas City, MO: Franklin Hudson Publishing, 1919), 83–84.

⁵⁸ Ferrell, *Collapse at Meuse-Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division*, 48.

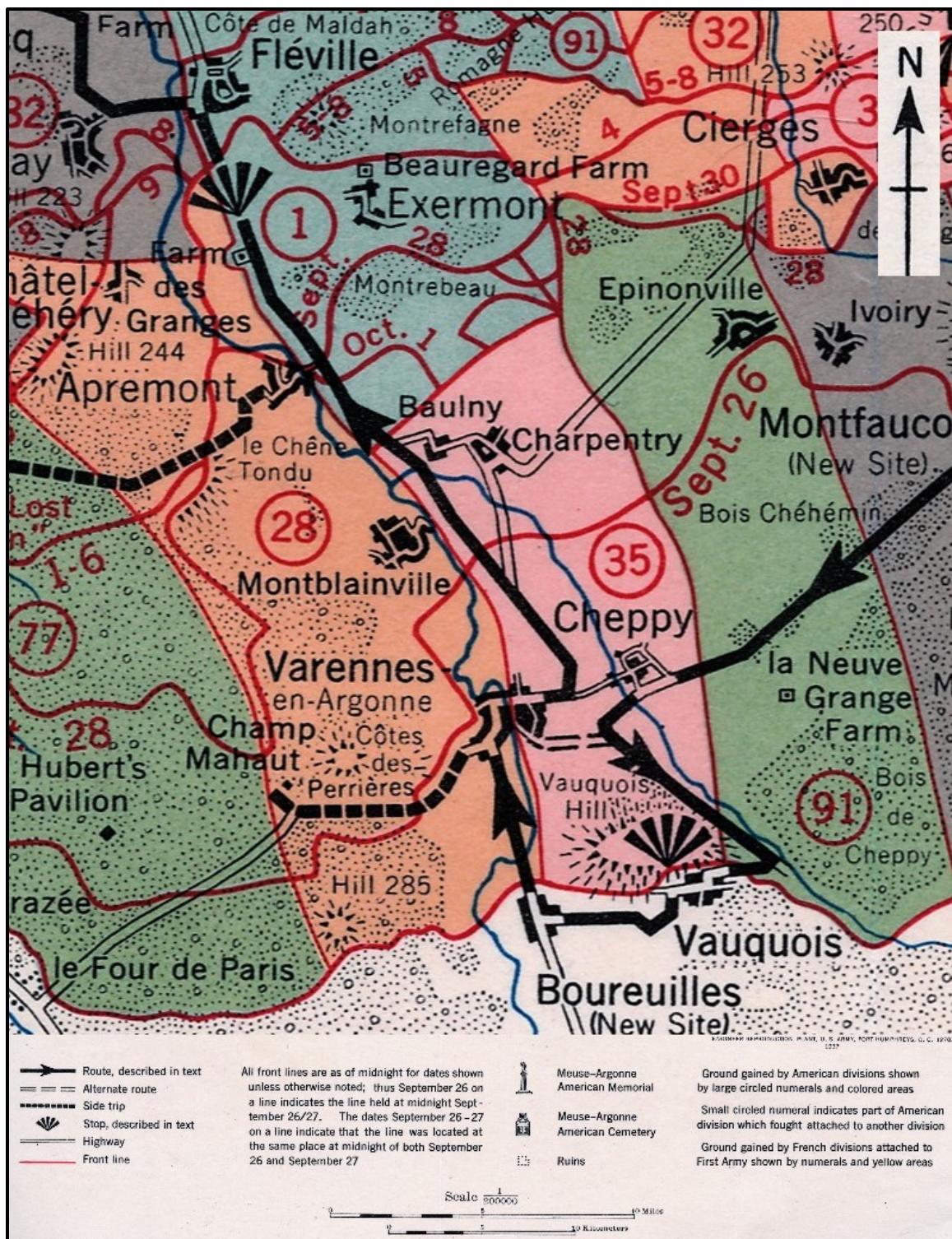


Figure 6. 35th Division Zone of Action. American Battle Monuments Commission, *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1938).

The division identified the most significant decisive point on the second day as Exermont. The division also identified Charpentry, Baulny, Chaudron Ferme, and Montrebeau Wood as decisive points along the division's line of operations, necessary to allow the division to take Exermont.⁵⁹ The division found success and gained Charpentry, Baulny, and Chaudron Ferme. Division elements advanced as far as the southern edge of Montrebeau Wood, but lacked the capacity to maintain the advance and withdrew. The Montrebeau Wood, as a decisive point, would provide the division a marked advantage and contribute materially to achieving success required to reach Exermont.

The division's tempo on the second day of operations lacked the rhythm it achieved during the first day. The inability of the division artillery to provide supporting fires for the assault and eliminate the harassing fires from the northwest caused the division to lose initiative and momentum. The high number of casualties inflicted by the enemy lessened the division's endurance and ability to conduct offensive operations as anticipated.⁶⁰

On September 27, 1918, the division continued the attack, with Seventieth Infantry Brigade in line and Sixty-Ninth Infantry Brigade in support. At 1:00 a.m., First Corps issued field orders directing the division to resume its attack along the same line of operations at 5:30 a.m., to meet the end state of reaching the division's decisive point at Exermont, along the Combined First Army objective. At 2:00 a.m., the division mistakenly issued two sets of orders for the attack that placed the Seventieth Brigade in the lead, supported by artillery. The orders had conflicting times, with the final set of orders placing the time of attack at 6:30 a.m. At 5:30 a.m., the 140th Infantry passed through the 138th Infantry and began to advance at 6:30 a.m., with minimal

⁵⁹ Peter Traub, "Field Order No. 47," September 27, 1918, Records of the American Expeditionary Forces (World War I): Records of the 35th Division, US Army, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

⁶⁰ Hoyt, *Heroes of the Argonne: An Authentic History of the Thirty-Fifth Division*, 81.

artillery support. Due to insufficient artillery support, the 140th Infantry advanced minimally before heavy enemy fire ground the regiment's advance to a halt.⁶¹ At 9:00 a.m., the 139th Infantry attacked without artillery support, after waiting three hours for the artillery support to materialize. The regiment immediately encountered heavy direct and indirect fire that stopped its advance. At noon, the 139th Infantry attempted to resume the attack supported by tanks. Concentrated enemy indirect fire knocked the tanks out of action after advancing only three-hundred meters, again halting the 139th Infantry's advance.⁶² At 2:00 p.m., the 140th Infantry also attempted to resume its advance with tank support, but again failed to make any measurable advance. At 5:30 p.m., the 140th Infantry resumed its attack, after securing additional tank and artillery support. Elements of the 140th Infantry advanced to and dug in northeast of Chaudron Ferme, while other elements of the 140th Infantry reached the ridge northeast of Charpentry and formed a line there for the night.⁶³ At 6:00 p.m., the 137th and 139th Infantry Regiments advanced with sufficient indirect fire and tank support. The regiments were successful and took both Charpentry and Baulny during the advance.⁶⁴ At 6:15 p.m., elements of the 139th Infantry advanced to Montrebeau Wood, then withdrew to the slope south of the wood for the night.⁶⁵ At 6:30 p.m., elements of the 137th Infantry advanced to the northwest in the direction of l'Espérance, then withdrew to the hill north of Baulny for the night.⁶⁶ At 7:00 p.m., elements of the 139th Infantry advanced through Chaudron Ferme and formed a line for the night along the

⁶¹ Evan A. Edwards, *From Doniphan to Verdun: The Official History of the 140th Infantry* (Lawrence, KS: World, 1920), 61.

⁶² Kenamore, *The Story of the 139th Infantry*, 27–29.

⁶³ Edwards, *From Doniphan to Verdun: The Official History of the 140th Infantry*, 64.

⁶⁴ Haterius, *Reminiscences of the 137th U.S. Infantry*, 147.

⁶⁵ Kenamore, *The Story of the 139th Infantry*, 30–31.

⁶⁶ Haterius, *Reminiscences of the 137th U.S. Infantry*, 148.

hedge north of the farm.⁶⁷ At 11:00 p.m., First Corps issued field orders directing the assault to reach the Combined First Army Objective to resume at 5:30 a.m. the next morning. The division maintained contact with the 91st Division throughout the night near Les Bouleaux Bois; a kilometer within the 35th Division's zone of action. The division also maintained contact throughout the night with the 28th Division just east of Montblainville, along the shared divisional border.⁶⁸

September 28, 1918

The division again designated Exermont as the key decisive point, and emphasized the necessity of gaining Montrebeau Wood to enable taking Exermont. Montrebeau Wood was the most difficult decisive point to attain due to the significant resources the enemy employed to defend it. The division also identified Chaudron Ferme and l'Espérance as essential to mission accomplishment and necessary to retain the initiative. Chaudron Ferme and l'Espérance provided the division with points along the east-west road that formed a line to continue the assault into and through Montrebeau Wood.⁶⁹

The division lost the tempo necessary to conduct sustained offensive operations on the third day. The intermingling of units, along with poor control, and the division's inability to provide sustained and effective artillery fire caused the division to lose the momentum necessary to retain and exploit the initiative. The division's lack of adequate tempo began to erode its anticipated operational reach.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Kenamore, *The Story of the 139th Infantry*, 31.

⁶⁸ Center of Military History, *Order of Battle of the United States Land Forces in the World War: American Expeditionary Forces: Divisions*, 217.

⁶⁹ Spaulding, *The Thirty Fifth Division 1917-1918: An Analytical Study*, 38.

⁷⁰ Ferrell, *Collapse at Meuse-Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division*, 63–64.

On September 28, 1918, the division failed to issue a field order and instead transmitted the order via radio and in person to the brigade commanders.⁷¹ Due to the mixing of the formations, the division formed provisional brigades with the Sixty-Ninth Brigade on the left formed from the 137th and 139th regiments. On the right, the 138th and 140th regiments formed the Seventieth Brigade. The division formed with brigades abreast and the brigade boundary running north-south from Exermont through Charpentry to Cheppy.⁷² At 5:30 a.m., the 140th Infantry attacked on the right and made a minimal advance after encountering heaving enemy fire.⁷³ At 6:30 a.m., elements of the 137th and 139th regiments faced an enemy counter attack from the Montrebeau Wood and successfully pushed it back. At 7:30, the 137th Infantry attacked on the left to the west and into the Montrebeau Wood.⁷⁴ At 7:45 a.m., elements of the 139th Infantry resumed the attack on the left just to the right of the 137th Infantry.⁷⁵ At 9:45 a.m., the 140th Infantry, as well as elements from the 138th Infantry, launched an attack, supported by tanks, into and east of Montrebeau Wood.⁷⁶ Additional elements of the 139th Infantry launched their attack in conjunction with and to the left of the 140th Infantry into and west of the Montrebeau Woods.⁷⁷ Those lead elements of the division captured and occupied Montrebeau Wood and held a line on the north edge of the wood through the night. The division maintained contact with the 91st Division, which had drifted west into the 35th Division's zone of action, throughout the night. The 35th Division maintained contact through the night with the 28th

⁷¹ Spaulding, *The Thirty Fifth Division 1917-1918: An Analytical Study*, 38.

⁷² Kenamore, *From Vauquois Hill to Exermont: A History of the Thirty-Fifth Division*, 197.

⁷³ Edwards, *From Doniphan to Verdun: The Official History of the 140th Infantry*, 67.

⁷⁴ Haterius, *Reminiscences of the 137th U.S. Infantry*, 150.

⁷⁵ Kenamore, *The Story of the 139th Infantry*, 36.

⁷⁶ Edwards, *From Doniphan to Verdun: The Official History of the 140th Infantry*, 67.

⁷⁷ Kenamore, *The Story of the 139th Infantry*, 37.

Division near L'Espérance. At 11:00 p.m., First Corps issued orders to resume the attack at 5:30 a.m., the following morning.⁷⁸

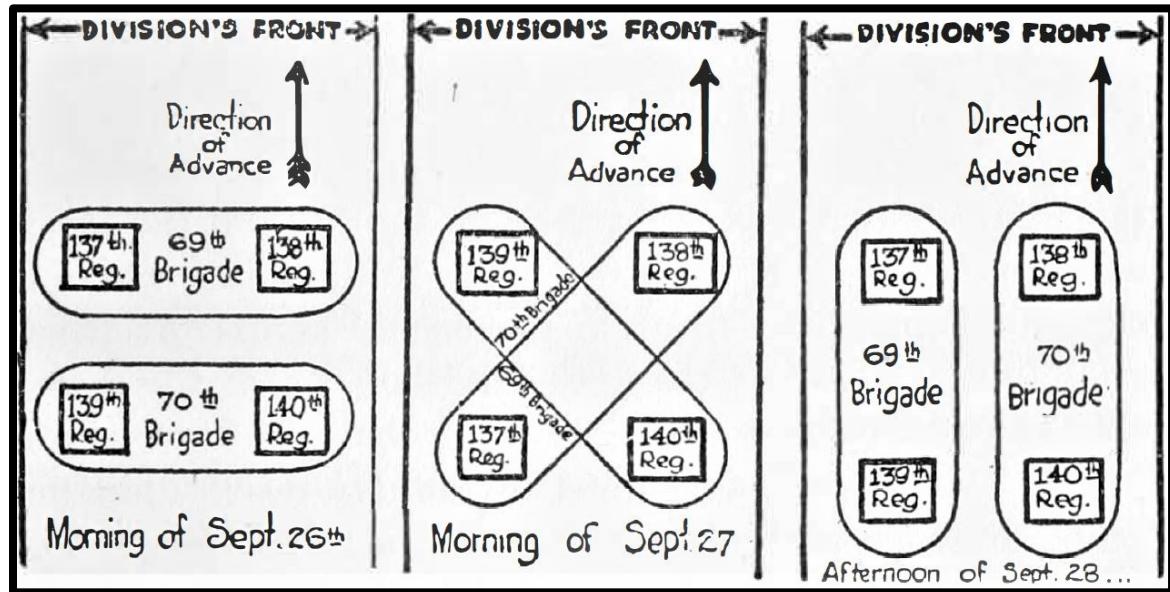


Figure 7. Division Formations During the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. Clair Kenamore, *From Vauquois Hill to Exermont, a History of the 35th Division of the United States Army* (St. Louis: Guard Publishing Co, 1919), 197.

The division chief of staff, Colonel Jens Bugge, proposed to General Traub that the division reorganize before any more attacks.⁷⁹ That day, General Pershing visited the First Corps headquarters and directed the Corps Chief of Staff, General Malin Craig to "call each Division Commander and in his name tell him that he must push on regardless of men or guns, night and day."⁸⁰ That afternoon General Pershing visited the division headquarters and said an attack was necessary and would happen that evening. He asked the division chief of staff, Colonel Bugge,

⁷⁸ American Battle Monuments Commission, *35th Division, Summary of Operations in the World War, 17–18.*

⁷⁹ Ferrell, *Collapse at Meuse-Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division*, 83.

⁸⁰ Pierpont L. Stackpole and Robert H. Ferrell, *In the Company of Generals: The World War I Diary of Pierpont L. Stackpole* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2009), 146.

what he thought. Colonel Bugge said it could not be done that evening with any assurance of success. The commander in chief then said to attack the next morning regardless of cost and without fail. He said the Germans were on the run and the war soon would be over.⁸¹ That evening, General Traub expressed to the Corps Commander, General Liggett, that he anticipated the 35th Division needing to dig in on that day's furthest line of advance to reorganize. General Liggett reminded him that General Pershing's order "was to keep on pushing."⁸²

September 29, 1918

On September 29, 1918, the division issued the order to continue its attack along its line of operations in the direction of the decisive point at Exermont. Specifically, the order read:

This Division will attack vigorously at 5:30 a.m., September 29th in two columns, and destroy or capture the enemy. General direction of attack, EXERMONT-BOIS de BOYON, practically parallel to the road connecting BAULNY and FLEVILLE.⁸³

Around eleven that morning, the commander determined from his assessment that the division would culminate prior to achieving his desired end state and that he needed to reframe. The division commander requested relief from the line, and ordered the division to transition to the defense in anticipation of its impending relief.⁸⁴

The division again designated Exermont as the decisive point required to gain a marked advantage over the enemy and contribute materially to achieving success. Twice the division attacked through Exermont, but was unable to hold it. The enemy continued to commit significant

⁸¹ Ferrell, *Collapse at Meuse-Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division*, 83.

⁸² Stackpole and Ferrell, *In the Company of Generals: The World War I Diary of Pierpont L. Stackpole*, 145.

⁸³ Peter Traub, "Field Order No. 48," September 28, 1918, Records of the American Expeditionary Forces (World War I): Records of the 35th Division, US Army, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

⁸⁴ Spaulding, *The Thirty Fifth Division 1917-1918: An Analytical Study*, 47.

resources to defend Exermont, pushing the division back past Montrebeau Wood. At the point that the division failed to retain Exermont it had effectively lost the initiative. The enemy's control of Exermont, followed by Montrebeau Wood, exhausted the division's momentum, forced early culmination, and allowed the enemy to counterattack.⁸⁵

At 3:00 a.m., the 35th Division issued the field order directing resumption of the attack, supported by tanks, at 5:30 a.m., in the direction of Exermont. By 5:00 a.m., most of the units had yet to receive the order for the attack from their respective brigades. At 5:30 a.m., the artillery began sporadic preparatory fire that failed to synchronize with the infantry.⁸⁶ Due to the 138th Infantry failing to receive the order for the attack in time, the 140th Infantry instead led the attack at 5:30a.m.⁸⁷ At 5:34 a.m., a small element of the 137th Infantry attacked from the northwest edge of the Montrebeau Wood, quickly reached Ruisseau d'Exermont, became enveloped and withdrew back to the north edge of Montrebeau Wood.⁸⁸ At 6:30 a.m., the 140th Infantry, with elements of the 139th Infantry attacked, supported by tanks. By 10:00 a.m., the combined assault successfully reached Exermont and managed to capture both Ferme de Beauregard & La Neuville-le-Comte Farm.⁸⁹ Further to the left, elements of the 138th Infantry attacked and reached the southern edge of Bois de Boyon, but heavy enemy fire forced it to withdraw.⁹⁰ The supporting tank element attempted to advance to Ferme d' Arietal, encountered heavy artillery, and halted its advance. At 11:00 a.m., those elements that found success and advanced the

⁸⁵ Ferrell, *Collapse at Meuse-Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division*, 63–64.

⁸⁶ Lee, *The Artilleryman; The Experiences and Impressions of an American Artillery Regiment in the World War. 129th F.A., 1917-1919*, 155.

⁸⁷ Edwards, *From Doniphan to Verdun: The Official History of the 140th Infantry*, 79.

⁸⁸ Kenamore, *From Vauquois Hill to Exermont: A History of the Thirty-Fifth Division*, 205.

⁸⁹ Edwards, *From Doniphan to Verdun: The Official History of the 140th Infantry*, 83.

⁹⁰ Kenamore, *From Vauquois Hill to Exermont: A History of the Thirty-Fifth Division*, 213.

farthest began to take heavy artillery and machine gun from three sides.⁹¹ Around that same time, the Division Commander, who had been at the front line since midnight, assessed the ability of the division to successfully continue its mission. General Traub made the decision that the division was near its culmination point and soon needed to transition to the defense in preparation for removal and relief from the line. General Traub sent the following message to First Corps:

Regret to report that this division cannot advance beyond the crest south of Exermont. It is thoroughly disorganized through loss of officers and many casualties, for which cannot give estimate owing to intermingling of units. Recommend it be withdrawn for reorganization and be replaced promptly by other troops in order that the advance may be continued.⁹²

At noon, the enemy launched a counterattack the pushed the main portion of the lead elements back beyond the southern edge of Montrebeau Wood. A small portion of mixed elements from the 137th and 139th regiments successfully defended against the enemy attack and remained in the Montrebeau Wood until ordered after dark to withdraw north of Baulny.⁹³ At 4:30 p.m., First Army ordered 1st Division to relieve the 35th Division during the night of September 30-October 1, 1918. At 5:30 p.m., the 110th Engineers and forward infantry elements occupied the trenches prepared by the engineers along the ridge northeast of Baulny.⁹⁴ The division's withdrawal exposed the right flank of the 28th Division, requiring the 28th Division to establish outposts west of the Aire River along a north-south line. At 11:00 p.m., First Army suspended all attacks and directed all three corps to organize defensive positions.⁹⁵ The division

⁹¹ American Battle Monuments Commission, *35th Division, Summary of Operations in the World War*, 19.

⁹² Kenamore, *From Vauquois Hill to Exermont: A History of the Thirty-Fifth Division*, 217.

⁹³ Haterius, *Reminiscences of the 137th U.S. Infantry*, 152.

⁹⁴ Edward P. Rankin, *The Santa Fe Trail Leads to France: A Narrative of Battle Service of the 110th Engineers (35th Division) in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive* (Kansas City, MO: Dick Richardson, 1933), 30.

⁹⁵ Drum, "Field Order No. 30," 152.

maintained its line during the night from the Aire River on the left to a point two kilometers from the division's eastern boundary. Through the night, the division failed to maintain liaison on the left with the 28th Division, but on the right maintained contact with elements of the 91st Division located two kilometers within the 35th Division's zone of action.⁹⁶

As the division continued its assault north to Exermont, it became evident to the division commander that the division lacked the tempo necessary to continue the offensive. The division exhausted its combat effectiveness and met the limit of its operational reach. The division culminated and no longer possessed the capability to continue its current form of operations. The enemy forced the division to cease offensive operations and transition to the defense. The division lacked the required resources to achieve its desired end state and required relief from the line for reorganization. The division met the limit of its operational reach at its culminating point. Its operational reach stretched from south of Vauquois Hill to the edge of Montrebeau Wood; endurance, momentum, and protection dictated its operational reach. Due to the enemy mounting a counter attack, the division fell back to its prepared defensive position along the ridge north of Baulny.⁹⁷

September 30, 1918

The division failed in its mission to take Exermont and maintain the tempo required to continue offensive operations enabling the advance to the Combined Army first objective, and successive objectives, in support of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. The division's failure required it to transition to the defense, enabling it to maintain gains and hold the line until 1st Division relief planned for 3:00 a.m., on October 1, 1918. During the period from the night of September

⁹⁶ American Battle Monuments Commission, *35th Division, Summary of Operations in the World War*, 20–21.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

29 to the early morning of October 1, 1918, the division maintained the tempo required to conduct defensive operations and repulsed numerous attacks by the enemy. Although the offense is where one typically assesses tempo, it was also observed in the defense. The division established and maintained a tempo for its operations in the defense that allowed it to repulse multiple enemy attacks. The rhythm the division executed in the defense, regarding sustainment and supporting fire, enabled it to maintain its established defensive line. The division's tempo prevented the enemy from overrunning the division's defensive positions.⁹⁸

As the division transitioned from the offense to the defense, it developed phases to retain its current position, execute its relief from the line, and move to the designated area in the rear for reorganization. The phases enabled the division to accomplish its new end state. The division's transition from offensive operations to the defense required planning and preparation to allow the division to maintain tempo and limit its vulnerabilities.⁹⁹

At 1:00 a.m., First Corps issued the field order directing the 35th Division to establish a defensive line along the Chaudron Ferme – l'Espérance Road, from Apremont on the left to Éclisfontaine on the right, and maintain contact with the enemy through deep patrolling.¹⁰⁰ At 7:30 a.m., the 35th Division issued the field order directing a defense in depth, with the primary line along the Chaudron Ferme – l'Espérance Road and the secondary line along the Baulny ridge. The division ordered the Sixty-Ninth Brigade to establish outpost positions along the south edge of Montrebeau Wood and the Seventieth Brigade to serve as the division reserve near

⁹⁸ Rankin, *The Santa Fe Trail Leads to France: A Narrative of Battle Service of the 110th Engineers (35th Division) in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive*, 30–31.

⁹⁹ Peter Traub, "Field Order No. 50," September 30, 1918, Records of the American Expeditionary Forces (World War I): Records of the 35th Division, US Army, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

¹⁰⁰ Malin Craig, "Field Order No. 61," September 30, 1918, Records of the American Expeditionary Forces (World War I): Records of the 35th Division, US Army, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

Charpentry. The division elements reinforced their current defensive line along the ridge northeast of Baulny, but failed to take any action to establish the northern line designated as the primary defensive line in the division order and by First Corps.¹⁰¹ At 9:00 a.m., the enemy launched an attack from the Montrebeau Wood and division elements near Chaudron Ferme stopped the advance, but not before the enemy was able to establish positions south of the Chaudron Ferme – l’Espérance Road.¹⁰² The rest of the day, the enemy managed a few small probing attacks resulting in negligible results. Artillery provided the bulk of the fire for the defense of the line. The division units spent most of the day reorganizing and preparing for the upcoming relief. At 11:30 p.m., the division issued the field order for 1st Division’s relief of the division, by 3:00 a.m. on October 1, 1918.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Spaulding, *The Thirty Fifth Division 1917-1918: An Analytical Study*, 50.

¹⁰² American Battle Monuments Commission, *35th Division, Summary of Operations in the World War*, 21.

¹⁰³ Traub, “Field Order No. 50.”

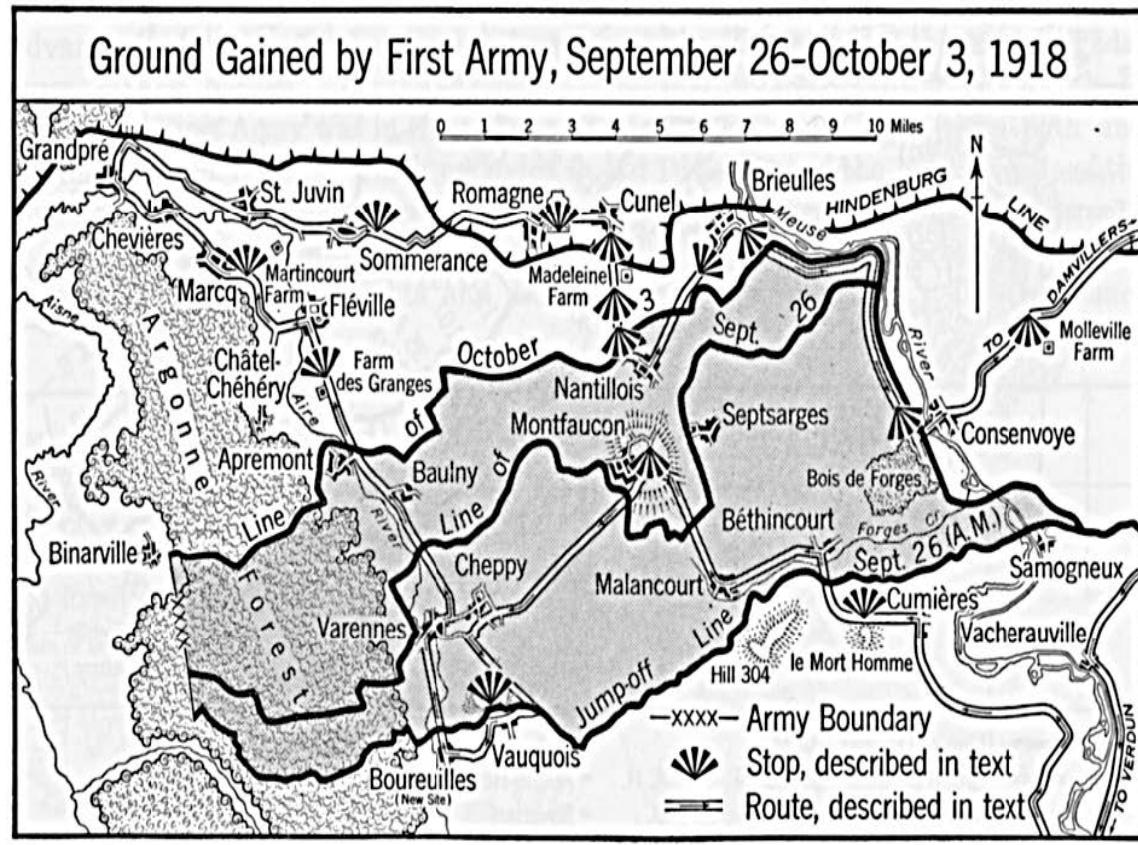


Figure 8. Ground Gained by First Army, September 26-October 3, 1918. American Battle Monuments Commission, *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1938), 175.

October 1, 1918

The morning of October 1, 1918, 1st Division relieved the 35th Division, which transitioned from the defense and assembled south of Cheppy in anticipation of its move to reorganize. The division transitioned from the defense to prepare for movement to serve as part of First Army's reserve. The depleted and disorganized division used the opportunity to reorganize, refit, and assess the actions of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. The division moved out of the defense, to the southern assembly area, and to the First Army reserve area in phases.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

On October 1, 1918, 1st Division relieved the 35th Division, which then assembled in the Very-Cheppy area. At 4:00 a.m., command of the sector passed from the 35th Division to the 1st Division, with the last elements of the 35th Division relieved at 5:45 a.m. At 6:00 a.m., the 35th Division began to assemble near Very and Cheppy and remained there until it moved to Bois de Beaulieu located south of Clermont-en-Argonne, where First Army designated it as the reserve. The Sixtieth Field Artillery Brigade remained in the sector proving fires until the 1st Artillery Brigade relieved it on the night of October 2-3, 1918.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion and Lessons on the Application of Operational Art

The history of National Guard Divisions employed in World War I provide practitioners with examples in the application of operational art. The historical case study of the 35th Division's operations during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive allows for the retroactive application of the elements of operational art. At the time of the division's actions in World War I, the concept and elements of operational art were not part of the US Army's doctrinal lexicon. The ability of current military practitioners to take the modern doctrinal concept of operational art and overlay its elements on a historical military operation provides support to the idea that we have always practiced operational art. The 35th Division's employment of operational art during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive exhibits the linkage between the elements of end state and conditions, decisive points, tempo, phasing and transitions, culmination, and operational reach. The division's proper employment of elements of operational art, led to early success in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. After the division's initial success, its failure to properly employ those same elements of Operational Art led to its demise and relief from combat.

¹⁰⁵ American Battle Monuments Commission, *35th Division, Summary of Operations in the World War*, 22.

The 35th Division's failure to properly employ the elements of operational art caused the initial desired end state to become unattainable after the first day of the offensive. For the division to attain the desired end state, the commander needed to reassess and reframe. The division commander's lack of situational awareness prevented him from properly assessing the ability to meet his desired end state. By the time he conducted a thorough assessment of the division on the fourth day of the offensive, it was too late. The division lost its cohesion and organization, leading to its lack of tempo resulting in the division's loss of momentum and initiative. The loss of significant amounts of soldiers and officers prevented the division from maintaining its momentum and ability to endure in the face of difficult enemy resistance.

If the desire was to maintain the division's ability to continue operations, and not simply to provide manpower up to its culmination point and replacement by a succeeding division, then the division needed to adjust the phasing of its operations in relation to the decisive points within its line of operations. Due to the division's disorganization and lack of artillery support, it was not able to maintain the tempo necessary to achieve the decisive points required to meet its end state. The unreasonable pace prevented the division from maintaining the momentum necessary to continue operations; they culminated. The commander failed to reassess and could only transition to the defense.

The case study of the 35th Division during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive shows the linkage between the elements of operational art and how their improper application led to operational failure and relief from combat. The division's failure to dominate the linked decisive points and maintain the tempo necessary to achieve their desired end state and conditions resulted in mission failure and provides a useful case for practitioners to study.

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